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ABSTRACT

This newsletter reports on phenomena at the intersection of linguistics and psychoanalysis and psychiatry. This issue consists of the following articles: (1) an editorial entitled "Idioms, How We Love/Have You!", on the possible reasons behind the use of idioms; (2) "The Last Renaissance (Language in a Drug Rehabilitation Community)," by Harold Amers, on the adaptive functions of language use in the transition from narcotics addiction to a drug-free life; (3) "The Psychosemanticist Will See You Now, Mr. Thurber," by Robert N. Ross, describing research on ways of analyzing semantic structures underlying the speech of patients undergoing psychotherapy; (4) "Words and Things," by Celio Gracia, on the relationship between form and content; and (5) "The Possibility Principle in Semantics," by Elaine Chaika, on generative grammar and semantics. The articles are followed by News Notes. (AM)

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LINGUISTICS AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

NEWSLETTER NO. 6, FALL, 1976

INTERFACE

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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1. Editorial: Idioms, how we love/hate you!

It is difficult to say when idioms were first noticed and who noticed them. But one thing is for certain. They have always meant trouble for some people. Ask any second-language learner and you will hear a litany of deprecation about those nasty little expressions scattered throughout the textbook which never mean what they seem to, or ought to mean. In real-life situations, the command of idioms becomes even more critical. At the end of a hearty meal in a French home, for example, one should be sure to say j'ai tres bien marge with all the ease of a native speaker if further helpings of food are to be politely refused. Je suis plein(e), the seemingly logical and literal translation from English, will not do--unless one intends to be rather vulgar and to imply the onset of drunkenness or pregnancy.

Switching locales and linguistic allusions, your editor finds himself a spectator at a verbal corrida in which two dear colleagues, Adam Makkai and Charles Ruhl, are taking the idiomatic bull by the horns and executing some fine linguistic veronicas and pasos de pecho. Each in his own way has succeeded in making linguistic theory give its liveliest performance. Working within the framework of stratificational theory (see, for example, his extensive treatment in Idiom Structure in English, Mouton, 1972), Makkai handles idiomaticity as a phenomenon occurring on either the lexemic stratum of language (words and short phrases) or on the immediately higher sememic one, with its sentence-long idioms. Ruhl (cf. his "Kick the bucket is not an idiom", Interfaces, no. 4, Dec. 1975) uses mass data to establish semantic paradigms for basic verbs like kick. Since kick reoccurs in several expressions which relate to death or dying (e.g., kick off and kick in , Ruhl argues that the verb is not idiomatic in an expression like kick the bucket. If there is an idiom lurking in this quaint expression, it must be in the use of the term bucket. Ruhl and Makkai have carried their mano a mano to the recent LACUS Forum held in El Paso, Texas (proceedings to appear shortly).

While I'm not certain about how different Ruhl and Makkai's positions will turn out to be (see, Elaine Chaika's article in this issue of Interfaces for yet another reaction to Ruhl), several matters have been cleared up for me. First of all, I now see that grammars as formulated by linguists can only handle literal language. Sentences explained through grammars may have more than one sense, but each sense must be a literal one. For example, the sentence, Flying planes can be dangerous, contains an ambiguity which is resolved grammatically by pointing out the two literal senses of flying planes: 'planes that fly' or 'the flying of planes (by someone)'. The idiomaticity of a sentence like He kicked the bucket is such that its full meaning would be never retrieved through a process similar to that used for literal sentences like Flying planes can be dangerous. Even if Ruhl is right about kick not being idiomatic, we would still have to explain the idiomaticity of the bucket when it is the object of kick. Makkai may be correct about idioms occurring at different strata of language, but we must still answer the question of why we have idioms, in the first place. After

all, we ought to be able to get along with only literal language. Doesn't he died convey the same information as he kicked the bucket--and with fewer words?

My suspicions are that we have idioms because we use language in ways that go beyond the transfer of information. As human beings we must have idiomatic ways of talking about death--or life or love or hate, for that matter. In fact, I would not be surprised to find that every human language in the world has idioms for all the basic functions of life, society, and the psyche. With idioms, we find the way to talk about things that would otherwise be unexpressable in language. The horrors of war, the ultimate alienation of death and the great ecstasy of love would remain vague phenomena if we could not discuss them in terms of easily understood happenings in our daily lives. If you look hard enough, you will find a touch of humor in an idiom like kick the bucket. Who kicks the bucket? Bad guys in detective stories and westerns. Verbs like depart, expire, and decease are reserved to express somber, serious feelings about the loss of beloved friends and relatives But let me end on a happier note: watching a sunset can be a delightful experience. Relating it verbally to the beauty found in a human face (e.g., 'she's as pretty as a sunset') is even more humanly fulfilling.

RDP

2. The Last Renaissance (Language in a Drug Rehabilitation Community)

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This report is on the adaptive functions of language use in the transition from narcotics addiction to a drug-free life. The reporter's approach is based on participant-observation and the results obtained are descriptive and personal rather than experimental and impersonal. The study was done at Last Renaissance, a Synanon-type therapeutic community located on the grounds of Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. This community is unusual in that, while utilizing the resources of a mental hospital, it maintains a high degree of autonomy for its internal affairs. Coming from participation in a network subculture of addiction and criminality, addicts enter this community and become part of a process which can enable them to remain drug-free when they re-enter the outside, wider community, which is seen as a special subculture with a set of traditions, rituals, values, language strategies, and a special vocabulary, developing over a period of time. The building of the community's code of behavior continues independently of the people involved (for the personnel constantly changes) and supplants a code of the streets (and prisons) formerly adhered to by the addicts.

The therapeutic process is viewed as a living experience in which the individual becomes involved for every waking hour, rather than a training session or some kind of social experiment Here, addicts do not undergo treatment. They learn and carry out a system of

social organization which helps them to build a new conception of social reality largely through language interaction. The therapeutic process can be partially described in terms of components. Yet, in isolation, each part tends to seem trivial. The initiation of a new member is a dramatic ritual in which the individual is led into making a vehement statement about his own condition and pleading that he needs help. This stark initiation rite constitutes a kind of compact for all those involved. The initiated member is soon in a position to help impose the same terms on other new members. All new members are immediately given duties and responsibilities for which they are held accountable by the group. During the carrying out of household tasks, new members begin a process of rote memorization which includes testing other members on the same information: (1) a philosophical credo which was composed by former members, (2) a set of terms and definitions which includes terms for various therapeutic language strategies, and (3) an open-ended set of popular sayings which embody ethical concepts and practical advice.

A basic assumption about the individual is that in order for him to continue to be involved in an illegal and detrimental activity such as the habitual use of narcotics (and other illegal, unethical, and dangerous activities often associated with it) he must suffer from some sort of personality disorder. Although hostility or disdain is often expressed for psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists, the practices and assumptions of the therapeutic community roughly overlap with the theories of these disciplines. The suppression of feelings is considered to have bad consequences, so ways of talking about one's feelings and those of others are taught, and ritualistic situations are devised for the cathartic venting of emotions. Since guilty secrets are felt to be detrimental, instruction is given in ways of self-revelation in special situations which might be considered somewhat analogous to psychotherapy. In a rough and ready way, the members become each other's analysts, but also confidants, teachers, employers, parents, siblings, and consciences.

Addicts frequently come from the highly verbal street culture of the inner city and therefore may already have developed considerable skills at language adaptation. Moreover, the street culture gives them additional resources for coping with situations such as physical violence, threats, flight, ostentatious dress, alliances with others, withdrawal into themselves, and the use of chemicals to allay psychic pain. In the therapeutic community these tactics are denied them by a group of fellow participants who share their background. The result is that former addicts are left with verbalization as their main tool and the rules of verbal interaction which work against deception, concealment, braggadocio, toadying and other negative ploys. An intensive period of this kind of community life (about a year) followed by a gradual re-entry into the outside world (a period of from six to eighteen months) leads to graduation from the program. While many do not graduate, of those who do, about 80 percent are considered successful, in that they are no longer using narcotics or engaging in activities deleterious to themselves or others, or that will cause them to be incarcerated. During the period of intensive therapy, they

relinquished most of their freedom in order to learn how to control their own lives. The question remains as to which factors of linguistic interaction contributed to their success, and how much.

3. The Psychosemanticist will see you now, Mr. Thurber

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Although speaking is such an important part of psychotherapy, very little is known about how it is used to convey meanings from one person to another. For withdrawn patients, gesture, silence, body posture, and so forth are all important signs. Patients who speak, however, reveal their symptoms primarily in their speaking: directly in the contents of the life experiences they report and indirectly in their style of talking. Psychiatrists diagnose and treat patients in talk, too. Because talk is so important in the therapeutic situation, the goal of our present research is to develop and test various ways of studying semantic structures underlying the speech of patients in psychotherapy.

In particular, we are investigating some semantic differences in the speech of two patients as they talk of themselves and of other people. We hope to analyze their speech in such a way that we can relate the contents of what they say to some of the underlying semantic decisions involved in producing it.

We are thus looking at the interaction of at least two sets of variables. One is relatively free and reflects sets of independent decisions to use the resources of language in a particular way. This we call style, personality, and so forth. The other, however, is predetermined to a very impressive degree. It is the rulefulness of language itself. When we analyze the speech of our two subjects, consequently, we see a great commonality of shared speaking behaviors (language) against which background we also see in sharp relief a few significant differences (speech). These few differences are responsible for the perceived differences in the speakers as people.

But how are we to study this venerable speech/language question empirically and (I might add parenthetically) quantitatively? Our first problem was to determine just what we were intent on examining: we had to select appropriate units of measurement. In investigating meaningful behavior, this is no simple task; for we are dealing with sets of systematic relations in which wholes inform the parts with meaning and yet there are no wholes without those constituent parts. We are indeed caught in an ecological dilemma. And yet, in understanding what another person says to us, we intuitively and more or less immediately reconstruct meaningful wholes from some set of analytic elements. Our research problem, then, was to find that appropriate set of analytic elements.

A large literature has now grown on the subject of semantic re-

presentation. We now believe that information about the world is stored in memory in the form of propositions. That is, the semantic representation out of which we construct our utterances are somehow propositional in structure. They have one verb and a series of nominal arguments bound to it. Case relations, as described by Chafe and Fillmore, are the ways in which the language marks the semantic functions performed by the nominal arguments in propositions.

Our semantic model is thus based on the notion that a sentence is a string of ambiguous word symbols that implies a complex structure of underlying concepts. A semantic analysis of a sentence transforms this string into a structure of unambiguous concept-markers interconnected by explicit semantic relations. The concept-markers and semantic relations are the deep case relations that connect nominal arguments to verbs. This complex structure of underlying concepts, or semantic representation, reflects the schemata or programs we have for taking apart our experiences and cataloguing the results of our analyses. By looking at the sets of nominal arguments with which a speaker represents Self and Other, we gain insight into the systems of meaningful relations with which he operates in his world.

Our problem became simpler: (1) Analyze the texts of various people's speaking first to constituent propositions and then (2) to the cases with which the various nominal arguments are marked. Then, having performed this parse of the speech, (3) study the frequency distributions with which the various cases (semantic functions) appear.

As a pilot, we studied three extended speech samples from two different speakers. We shall call them L. and A. They are both upper middle class, middle aged, successful, articulate men. They clearly come from similar backgrounds and, we would expect, are members of the same speech community. They differ in style, however. Speaker A. is an over-intellectualizing, endlessly qualifying person, a narcissist who has built notions of his own excellence by which he separates himself from others. Speaker L., on the contrary, seems to lack even a healthy narcissism. He is an active man, exploring his world, but a world populated by people rather too much like himself. These are very crude characterizations of the two speakers, intended only to give some general sense of the differences we feel between them. Our semantic analyses are to reveal some of the underlying sources of our intuitions.

I will summarize our findings. (The data is available on request.)

We find surprisingly close agreement with which A. and L. use the various functions (cases) in representing Self and Other.

SEMANTIC FUNCTION	SPEAKER L.		SPEAKER A.	
	Self	Other	Self	Other
Epistemic	.18	.09	.20	.03
Agent	.27	.35	.30	.35
Bearer	.18	.10	.15	.10
Reactor	.12	.05	.13	.09
Beneficiary	.11	.13	.13	.19
Experiencer	.09	.01	.08	0
Other cases	.06	.26	.03	.25

Counting the number of propositions devoted to representing Self or Other, we find that each speaker is more likely to speak of Self than Other (Chi square = 13, p .01). In talking of Self, moreover, each is most likely to represent Self as Agent. Others are important as Agent, too; as we shall see, correlations of Self and other as Agent or other cases is highly significant.

Studying variances within these distributions shows that the two speakers use the resources of their common language quite differently. We find that the diversity is greater for both speakers in representing Others than in representing Self. Others are given a greater variety of roles. We also find that the two speakers differ significantly in which semantic functions are context-sensitive across the various segments (that is, topics) of the sample. For speaker L. we find that the following cases are context-sensitive: $Agent_{other}$, $Beneficiary_{other}$, $Epistemic_{other}$, $Epistemic_{self}$, and $Experiencer_{self}$. For Speaker A., we find that a shorter list of cases is context-sensitive: $Agent_{other}$ and $Experiencer_{self}$. We conclude that speaker A. tends to use these cases similarly regardless of what he is talking about. Speaker L. is more specific and variable in his ways of talking about Self and Others.

Finally, by correlating the relative frequencies with which we find the various semantic functions in segments of the speech samples, we find an index of the speaker's social relations. L. differs from A. in the way he represents his role in the world. L. tends to represent himself as an Agent as he represents Others as Agent (r= .47). Speaker A. does not (r= -.24).

Correlations of Others as Agent with Self as Bearer or beneficiary are even more illuminating. Speaker L. tends to use Bearer for Self when he represents Others as Agent (r= .39). Speaker A. tends strongly not to (r= -.44). When we look at how they represent Self as Beneficiary, we find the situation reversed. L. tends not to represent Self as Beneficiary when he represents Others as Agent (4= -.49). Speaker A., on the contrary, tends very strongly to do so (r= .61).

We can sum this up tentatively: L. sees Others as powerful Agents capable of doing this <u>to</u> him; A. sees Others as less powerful Agents than himself, but capable, when they exercise their agency, of doing things <u>for</u> him.

So far we have looked only at the statistical distributions of

semantic functions fore representing Self and Other. We are now in a position to look closely at several other semantic and pragmatic aspects of each patient's speech. We are specially interested in (1) the semantic structures upon which patients build denying and negating statements; (2) embedding constructions; and (3) the ways in which they link propositions to each other in the course of their talk. (1) Denial and negation are crucial defenses. Studying their linguistic bases will illuminate the intrapsychic processes on which they are based. (2) Embedding is the very complex process by which some propositions are put inside others so that whole propositions serve as arguments of other propositions. The result is that we can study, in miniature, some aspects of how speakers build semantic systems. Similarly, (3) by studying argument-sharing, how single arguments of one proposition also serve as arguments of other propositions, we can investigate how propositions are linked to each other in natural flowing speech. By understanding the rules by which these relatively simple links are made, we are also beginning to understand the internal 'logic' by which people order their thoughts in speech.

4. Words and Things

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Words exist, things exist, and there also exists a relationship uniting words to things. The attempt to determine whether the relationship of a word to a thing is obligatory, analogic or arbitrary has been the focus of much debate. In fact, the correspondence between the word (sign) ox and the referent, or the thing known by that name, is established by social contract. The contract transcends each particular person. Every speaker is governed by a certain number of rules, although he may not be aware of them.

Linguists teach us to distinguish two aspects in a word: form and content. The form refers to the acoustic properties perceived by the auditor; the content refers to the concept. Form is necessarily tied to content, although without any fundamental cause. Between the chain of sounds and the concept no analogy exists to support the origin of the relationship even though the form of ox and the content of ox are necessarily united in one's consciousness and in one's vocabulary.

Some researchers are interested in the study of form while others prefer to study content. The study of content, the task of interpreting the meaning attributed to things, remains today the realm par excellence reserved for psychology. The study of form, of the acoustic image, has remained the domain of the linguist who has chosen to ignore or delegate to the psychologist the study of sense. Such a clear-cut division between form and content implies a boundary between

the two which does not really exist. The content appears in the form using a chain of sounds to transmit something as in puns, slips of the tongue, charades, crossword puzzles, faux pas.

The relationship between form and content has occasioned many imaginative analogies. Saussure often spoke of a piece of paper which when torn was obtainable on both sides. This constituted form (which Saussure termed 'signifier') and content (which he termed "signified".) Between these he drew a line separating the signifier from the signified. We may ask at what point the signifier breaks through the line and becomes the signified, or whether the line implies a complete obstruction, locating the signified (the concept) beyond the line. If the signifier is located on this side of the line the study of the form would be expediently handled by an impersonal, formalized method. I would like to suggest that this separation is not a rigid as was previously thought.

Saussure was interested in anagrams as aids to understand a language which conveys something even though all the words are not in the usual linear sequence. While there is a linear reading, a vertical reading also has meaning. A word can influence a neighboring word and combine with it to convey something that the two separately are not able to convey. Freud and Saussure were both very interested in what words could transmit by their physical form. Saussure studied the anagrams in the work of several Latin poets; Freud attempted to analyze the dreams related to him by his patients. Both men believed that language was a code to be deciphered relating the individual words to the whole in order to reveal in the context a net of meaning. Marx used to say that we do not find on the label of the merchandise the value which is conferred on it (the functional value, how much it is worth, or the exchange value, what we think it should be worth). Both are assigned values and are more or less concealed. The dream, the merchandise, and the anagram are all types of distortions, allusions, likenesses, false appearances. Thus, a way of reading is necessary which will retain the overall effect produced by the fragments. For example, in order to take notes in class more quickly, a student may invent a symbol which simplies or summarizes information. The condensation always conceals something and this sign might eventually serve to mislead the uninformed reader.

The use of concealment and simplification in language has been studied primarily under the heading of style and has not yet received a systematic approach by either psychologists or linguists. Yet speech and thought do constitute a combined field of study and have been regarded recently as facets of a single problem.

How did humans acquire their unique ability to formulate sentences from words? Two theories in particular invite our attention:

(1) Each word may have been gradually associated with other aspects of verbal behavior and the process of generalization would have served to link up the word units into complex chains.

(2) There may be an innate ability to organize and produce sequences of words. Abstract principles, in part universal, would govern mental faculties.

Once the language device is acquired, any child is able to

distinguish whether or not a sentence has meaning in his native language. Yet the speaker of a language is not necessarily conscious of the underlying rules involved. Because of this, the speaker's individual capacity to produce new sentences does not fully explain his linguistic competence. There must be a second level where rules as important as those already identified on the surface level would operate. We are now far from the Saussurean idea of signifier (form) and signified (content). In attempting to discover the deep rules which determine the production of a sentence a contribution from psychology becomes critical. The grammar set forth by contemporary linguistics has much to do with the structure of thought and with mental processes such as they are conceived by traditional psychology. The problem of meaning has been pushed to the side again, in keeping with the favoritism linguistics has always shown for the study of form rather than content.

Linguistics and psychology should not ignore the system of rules to which the speaker is subjected and the possible productivity preceding any concern with the pragmatic matter of communicating something. Semanticists should realize that the surface content of the message is not where the meaning is located. In addition, logicians should be told something about the metaphorical nature of speech. Finally, the psychologists and the psycholinguists are to be reminded that the speaker is not always aware of what he says. The Unconscious can play with words as if they were elements of a mise-en-scene.

5. The Possibility Principle in Semantics

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While explaining the import of his research in semantics at the "group dynamics, etc." interest group, G.U.R.T., 1976, Professor Ruhl exulted, "This proves that you can't generate sentences." This very utterance illustrates a fundamental aspect of oral communication, what I call the "possibility principle." That is, a speaker need not encode sentences using the precise syntax and lexicon that unambiguously states what he means. He can so precisely encode if he wishes or must, as when he's asked to repeat himself or explain, but often he need not. All he has to do is creat an utterance close enough so that, given the context of utterance including shared knowledge, the hearer extracts a likely meaning. Hearers, apparently, expect utterances not to be precise. Clark and Lucy (1975) show that people constantly match utterances to the situation of occurrence before making an interpretation, figuring what the utterance could possibly mean, as opposed to what it actually means or would mean context-free. Allowing such a strategy as part of the normal demands on linguistic production leads to communicative efficacy as well as creativity. If absolute precision of encoding were necessary, speakers would have to weigh every word, formulate each sentence with complete care; thus slowing down social interaction. Furthermore, figurative language,

sarcasm, new ways of expressing old thoughts, all would be impossible. Babies, young children, non-native speakers, and those with speech pathologies could not be understood. The heart of all creativity and change in language is that it need not be precise, only precise enough for someone to figure what the speaker must mean, despite what he said. There is a constant tension between the rules of language, many of which are very precise, else no one could learn language at all, and the possibility principle. If modern linguistics has had a failing in its quest for syntactic rules which produce meaningful utterances, it is only in that syntacticians have been concerned with what a sentence can mean. What is probably more pertinent is what it can not mean, since it can mean so many different things given so many different possible contexts for which it could be used, both those contexts which the utterance fits and those for which a hearer can say, "What can he possibly mean?" and then figure out the possibilities. Professor Ruhl's statement, with which I opened this, serves as a case in point. His actual statement, to me at least, meant that people can not create sentences. Patently, this is untrue. Professor Ruhl himself made gorgeous sentences during his talk, all of which conformed to the syntactic/lexical rules for English which I know closely enough so that I was apparently able to understand him, as most of the audience seemed to. So, he could not have meant that people cannot create sentences. The fact that he selected the item generate instead of make or create cued us that Professor Ruhl has studied modern linguistics, as generate is used by linguists as their buzz word. That is, by using generate instead of make, one announces or reinforces to one's hearer that one is a linguist; hence, what one says about language should be taken seriously. Certainly, given the context of utterance, no one would have thought that Professor Ruhl was talking about shining sentences through an overhead projector, making a poster with sentences all over it, or generating sentences in neon lights. The most likely possibility was that Professor Ruhl meant generate in one of the senses that linguists from Chomsky on down have meant it. Since he couldn't have meant it in the sense of actual speech by humans, he must have meant it in the sense of linguists drawing diagrams and writing lengthy arguments about how which syntactic/lexical, etc. rule produces which sentence which produces which meaning. As noted above, for the reasons noted above, I should have to concur with Professor Ruhl's conclusion, although not necessarily with his arguments. For instance, I disagree with him that "kick the bucket" is not an idiom, although, to be sure, he and I may not be defining idiom in the same way. I feel that "kick it" can be used as a substitute for "kick the bucket", not because the latter has literal meaning. It's just that, if someone said "kick it" in a context strongly evocative of someone's death, by the possibility principle, the hearer would match it up with the only thing that fits, "kick the bucket." Certainly, without strong contextual clues, "kick it" does not mean "die." Its primary meaning, the one given by most speakers I asked, was physically kicking an object. When pressed, they most often extended its meaning to "kick the habit", give up cigarettes or dope. That it could mean "die" occurred to no one in

the admittedly small sample I used. However, I can easily conceive of situation that would force that meaning, such as "Poor Celia, she finally kicked it." If we knew Celia had been very sick, that alone, or the use of "poor" could make the hearer guess that Celia kicked the bucket. Actually, without the "poor" and without a sad expression on the face or depressed intonation or droopy shoulders, perhaps "kick it" could also be interpreted as she conquered her illness. Try to get a meaning of "die" from a "Celia kicked it" said cheerfully (assuming Celia wasn't a mass murderer or its equivalent.)

Similarly, although I have to agree that certain lexical items have invariant semantic features which carry through multi contexts, I suspect that even here the possibility principle would explain many of Professor Ruhl's examples. He mentioned "break a wrist." This, until that moment, only meant to me that someone fractured the bone(s) in his wrist. If the context wouldn't allow that interpretation, I could see its being used to mean that someone used his wrist for very hard work, like playing the one-armed bandits in Las Vegas or operating a machine in a jewelry factory in Providence, e.g., "What a lousy day. I break my wrist all day and come home to a nagging husband." Whatever the meaning features of break are, however, no way would I have ever figures that "break a wrist" in golfing or baseball means what Professor Ruhl said it means. I don't doubt him. The point is, the invariant features of break fail for me in contexts that I am so unfamiliar with that I cannot think of a possible alternative to a literal meaning.

I'll close with the quote I opened with, Professor Ruhl's "You can't generate sentences." For one schooled in linguistic theory post-Chomsky, this statement had even more meaning. It was a clear reference to linguistic polemics of the sort started by Chomsky and fathered-forth by McCawley, Lakoff, Ross, and a string of etceteras, all brilliant, to be sure, but all with one habit: find one phrase or sentence as a counterexample to whatever formalism one os objecting to at the moment, and then sing "Aha! This proves you can't X" where X is whatever the other guy did to explain the few sentences he chose to explain. Whether Professor Ruhl was making fun of such scholars, or whether he agrees with their methodology and was adding to their body of "This proves", I could not tell, not knowing Professor Ruhl well enough. Therefore, either possibility was potential, creating an ambiguity. (Incidentally, one of the reasons we often do not recognize ambiguity in context, is that the "wrong" meaning is not possible, and possibilities are what we work with.) My comment on the entire "This proves" segment of scholarship, is that, given the complexity of language, and given its ever-changing character, it seems that if one looks hard enough, one can always find some language data that proves or disproves what one wills. All one must do is be willing to ignore everything that does not fit. Further, if one is willing to dispense with checking out one's intuitions on a large sample of native speakers, one is hindered even less in proving whatever about language. Then, if one is willing to allow such ad hoc devices as "strike me" transformation to get from "remind" (or

was Postal suggesting the revers), then there is nothing that cannot be proved. My caveat to my own students is, just because a theory or explanation does not cover all cases does not mean it is wholly not valid. Chomsky, for instance, was correct obviously in noting that structural linguistics was not able to explain certain things about language, but he was incorrect in assuming that structuralism had no value in linguistic description. In fact, it is becoming more and more evident that the kinds of structural cues segmented out by descriptive linguists are what people actually use to decode speech. Certainly, before any dep analysis can be made of a language, some structural description must be made. There is no one, simple mode of analysis that is ever going to explain all of language. Professor Ruhl's search for semantic unity explains why certain words can be used in so many contexts, for instance. However, it does not explain why, over time, certain contexts become closed to a lexical item (e.g., Arthur Conan Doyle in The Hound of the Baskerville "I discovered myself", meaning "I came out of hiding."); why a lexical item changes meaning in time drastically, even a very common one that was once used in many contexts, such as tell, whereas others do not, such as brought, which is unchanged from Anglo-Saxon to today. Nor does his search explain why different "general" words take on the same meaning in two different dialects. For instance, in Washington, D.C , everyone kept telling us to "make" a left or right turn, whereas any Rhode Islander knows that one "takes" a turn. Similarly, we in southern New England know that New Yorkers are a bit weird because they stand on line to take a haircut, but we stand in line to get one. This kind of dialect difference in assigning semantic features to lexical items seems to be contrary to Professor Ruhl's discoveries about the unity of semantic features, but that doesn't prove he's wrong. Of course he's not. Both things go on in language.

Reference

Clark, Herbert H. & Peter Lucy, 1975. "Understanding what is meant from what is said: a study in conversationally conveyed requests", Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 14.1, 56--72.

News Notes

1. We are pleased to report that Roger Wescott's piece 'Language Dreaming' (Interfaces, no. 3, April, 1975) is being reprinted in his new book, Sound and Sense: Linguistic Essays on Phonosemic Subjects (forthcoming from Jupiter Press, Lake Bluff, Illinois 60044).

2. Interfaces will be happy to know of a very informative newsletter on nonverbal communication: Nonverbal Components of Communication: Paralanguage, Kinesics, Proxemics, edited by Prof. Mary Ritchie Key, Department of Linguistics, University of California,

Irvine, California 92717. The most recent issue (no. 14, March 1976) has notes on gestems in Australian sign language, neurolinguistics and sign language, and a list of interesting new books on gestures, body language, semiotics, speech surrogates and language origins. For more information write directly to Professor Key.

3. Interfaces is now available on microfiche from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Microfiche copies can be obtained from Ms. Kathleen M. Correll, ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages & Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1611 North Kent Street, Arlington, Va. 22209.

4. Another newsletter of interest, particularly to those Interfacers who are sociolinguists, is Linguistic Theory and the Real World edited by Lloyd Anderson (4375 Ludlow Street, Boulder, Colorado 80303). The first issue is dated June, 1976 and contains a fairly extensive bibliography on 'truth, deception, and invited inferences'. There is also a very good discussion of 'scaling analysis' written by the editor himself.

5. On Friday, November 19, at 8 pm, Prof. Noam Chomsky will present a lecture at the National Academy of Sciences Auditorium (Washington, D.C.) entitled Language and Unconscious Knowledge. This lecture is part of the series on psychiatry and the humanities sponsored by the Washington School of Psychiatry.

6. Prof. Teresa de Lauretis of the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee has written a study of the narrative structure of the Italian writer Italo Svevo: La Sintassi del desiderio (Ravenna, Italy: A. Longo, 1976). Svevo who was a friend of James Joyce was much influenced by Freud.

7. Interfacer Adam Makkai's revision of A Dictionary of American Idioms is off the presses. It's good to see all those good old idioms still alive and kicking!

8. The next issue of Interfaces will appear in Spring, 1977, following the annual Georgetown University Interest Group Meeting on Linguistics and Psychoanalysis (slated for March 17, 1977). If you are planning to attend please suggest topics to be discussed by the group (and later summarized in Interfaces). Send your ideas to R. Di Pietro, Editor, Interfaces.

The Puns Keep Coming In:

'Librarians are novel lovers' (G.U. student)
'Puberty is a hair-raising experience' (graffiti)
'Oil fueling Scots' drive for autonomy' (from the L.A. Times, Sept. 26, 1976, sent by Prof. Mary Ritchie Key)